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HOUSEKEEPERS' CHAT

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Subject: "The Home and the Child"

No Publications Available

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The Newlywed Young Lady in the next block did a good deed for her young husband last night. She gave his ego a chance to expand, and furnished him with an excellent contribution to their set's small talk.

The Newlywed Young Lady was driving the family car. And she drove it smack through a red light. And the champion arrester of the traffic force was waiting right there for her. He waved her to the curb, asked to see her driver's permit, then asked, "Do you work?"

Then was when the Newlywed Young Lady said her piece that heightened the morale of her husband, and gave him such a good anecdote.

"No," she answered the officer. "No, I don't work. I'm married."

But the humor in that innocent remark will seem sort of grim, I'm thinking, to some of you mothers. An investigation of the working day of farm homemakers revealed the fact that those who had a baby less than a year old spent an average of 73 hours a week on the job. And some figures gathered among a group of city homemakers who have very comfortable incomes and can afford a certain amount of paid help, disclosed that even under those favorable circumstances, the mother with a baby under one year of age spent 24 hours a week in the care of children and 34 hours in housekeeping. A total of 58 hours per week. Certainly a full time job.

All of which leads me to offer you today some summaries of findings from the studies of two committees on the White House Conference on Child Health and Protection. Because I think perhaps they point to ways and means of giving Mother a little protection from slavery to household duties.

One report, from the committee on furnishing and equipping the home for children advances the idea that both children and mother can profit by giving thought to inexpensive ways of making the home comfortable for the children.

It's staggering to imagine the hours added to housekeepers' working weeks by cleaning up after a thoughtless brood who track mud onto the rugs. The committee mildly suggests that providing a family wrap closet in the hall, and equipping it with a low shelf or rack for overshoes and some low hooks for coats might save some of those hours.





So it goes, all over the house. We keep trying to make our children fit our furniture and equipment and home arrangements, instead of providing a few things of their own size for their comfort -- and ours. Then we wonder why the little tots never put their things away, are often restlessly crawling over the best furniture, and frequently need scolding or punishment for one thing or another. We wonder because we are disturbed by things as they affect us. Perhaps we would do better to wonder about the effect this totally adult environment is having on the child.

The committee report does not make a plea for an elaborate outlay of special furniture or a great variety of expensive toys. It points out that what the child needs most can often be provided at little expense and placed with ease in even the tiniest of homes. The plan really involves simply giving thought to the children in every part of the house, from the front door to the back.

For the youngest child, a low hook or two in the family closet, and in the living room a small chair and a few books or toys on the bottom book shelf. Somewhere a special place to keep his clothes -- perhaps only the bottom drawer of his mother's dresser. And a box or shelf for his toys and other possessions where they are in his easy reach. His own bed, if possible -- ideally in a separate bedroom.

A towel rack and toothbrush hook low enough for the shortest member of the family to reach them, and a sturdy stool, or set of movable steps in the bathroom for the toddler to stand on when learning to wash himself. It can be done, this matter of providing for the best interests of the child of each age, but sometimes it means a little sacrifice on the part of the adults. It may be necessary to give up for a time the space a living room chair would require in order to make room for a playpen in the apartment living room. Not ideal, of course. But if there is no other spot available that is convenient for the mother to observe the baby at play while she works, then it is one of those desirable makeshifts in planning the furnishings of the home for family rather than for adult satisfaction.

Well, so much for some of the points in the report of the White House Conference committee on furnishing and equipping the home for the child. Another committee of the conference dealt with the problems of managing the home for the best interest of the younger generation -- and incidentally of the mother. Here is the way Miss Hildegard Kneeland of the Bureau of Home Economics, a member of the conference committee, sees its findings:

"I wonder what sort of a picture comes to your mind when you think of a well-managed home. To some men, perhaps, the term has a cold and forbidding sound. It suggests a home run with such perfect order and system that it is a major offense to have newspapers or cigar ashes around, and high treason to come home late for dinner. Perhaps to some homemakers too the idea of good management is anything but inviting. It may make them think of that very particular neighbor who is, to be sure, a perfect housekeeper, but who also is a perfect example of what not to be in making the family comfortable and happy.

"Needless to say, it is not this type of management which is recommended in the report of the White House Conference committee on the management of home activities. The committee recognizes, of course, the importance of a clean and orderly house in bringing up the children, of serving the right sort of meals, and serving them on time, of having the housekeeping run smoothly so as to avoid



friction and strain and emotional upsets. But it emphasizes even more the importance of adjusting the housekeeping to the needs of the family, of making the home a place to be lived in, enjoyed, a place where every member of the family, from father to the smallest child, finds comfort and good comradeship, and an opportunity to develop his interests and abilities.

"The report especially stresses the importance of having the children share in the various activities of the home. Remember that the child who learns to dress and undress himself at an early age, who puts away his own things, and little by little takes over small tasks about the house, is forming habits that will be useful all of his life. But let me say at once that the committee recognizes the fact that we cannot return to the days when the children spent a great deal of time in helping with the work of the home. For the modern boy and girl the demands of school work, their clubs, their games fill the daytime hours to overflowing, and in the evening there are lessons to get for the next day.

"There is a real educational value, as I have said, that comes through the child's opportunity to help. He gets training in cooperation, and develops a sense of responsibility and a feeling of real importance in the home of which he is a part. At the same time, the tasks that he does help him to develop skills, making him deft with his fingers, so that when he grows up, he is not one of those helpless persons who can do nothing useful about the house.

"But, ' you are probably thinking, 'but it is all very well to talk about letting the children share in the work of the home. Getting them to do it isn't so easy. 'Yet after all isn't the child usually willing enough and often anxious if we go about it just right in getting him started? The most important thing is to begin with the little tots. Give the toddler a chance to wipe the teaspoons, to carry a dish or two to the china closet, to put away his own toys. To him, it is wonderful to be helping mother, and at the same time it is valuable entertainment by which he learns and develops steadiness in growing muscles. With such a start, by the time the child is 10 or 12, a wellgrounded habit of being useful has been formed.

"Even so, it is important to offer enough variety in the tasks expected of children so they are not bored by them. Clara may find daily dish washing a chore, but if she has the choice sometimes of putting away the clean laundry, or of planning the meals, her interest will continue. Likewise, her big brother may resent having to bring in wood for the kitchen stove or caring for the furnace every day, but he may take a real pride in washing the automobile, or learning to grease it."

Of course, for a time, while this sort of good management in the home is going into working order, it may add to the mother's heavy schedule, rather than lighten it. But later it will save the homemakers time. It is well worth the effort, when we consider the value to the home life of the family.

And in the period when it adds to your burdens, cut out the frills and furbelows of housekeeping. Plan simple meals with no complicated dishes that require a great deal of your time to prepare. Use no unnecessary dishes in serving, and avoid table linen that is difficult to launder. In short, study housekeeping to see where you can cut the corners without lowering your standard in any way that matters too much.

TOMORROW: "Warm Weather Clothes for the Youngster"



